



Implementing Functional standards

A guide for senior officers accountable for managing a function across government (Heads of Functions)

Purpose of guide

The purpose of this reference guide is to support new Heads of Function and other leaders joining the centre of a government function to make the best use of functional standards.

What are functions and standards

A government function is a cross government grouping embedded into departments and arm's length bodies to manage specialist work. The purpose of each function is summarised on the [government functions guidance page](#) on gov.uk. A function harnesses the skills of people from any relevant government profession.

A *functional standard* sets the expectations for the management of a function's work across government.

Functional standard GovS 001, Government functions, addresses the purpose of functions and what is required of their leaders. The other standards set expectations for the management of their respective function's work.

The standards clarify what should already be happening in every organisation and work as a suite cross-reference, where appropriate, to the functional standards they rely on.

The standards drive coherence, consistency and continuous improvement, to support the enduring principles and requirements set out in [Managing Public Money](#).

Continuous improvement assessment frameworks set levels of maturity (using 'good', 'better' and 'best' criteria) against the most important aspects of a standard and makes it easy for organisations to understand how well

they are doing in complying with the standard, and where they should aim to improve.

Mandate of standards

Functional standards were mandated for use across government (including arm's length bodies) in September 2021, and may also be adopted by other public sector organisations, see [Dear Accounting Officer letter DAO 05/21](#).

Consistent language used in standards

A functional standard uses consistent language and agreed definitions. Standards state what is mandatory (shall) and strongly advisory (should). They also share a *common glossary of terms* to be used in the organisation's documentation so people are clear on what is meant – avoiding misunderstandings.

Appropriate and proportionate use of standards

The standards should be applied proportionately to the size and complexity of the functional work done in an organisation, and used together with continuous improvement assessment frameworks to drive improvement over time.

Each organisation may decide how to conform with the standard in practice, taking advice from the relevant functional leader either in an organisation/parent department or across government.



Using GovS 001

GovS 001: Government Functions and associated guidance, helps you to run an efficient and effective function. It sets the accountabilities for the management of your function across government; and the accountabilities to the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Civil Service for establishing, controlling and championing your functional standard. It sets expectations for the common management practices across functions, to: set and assure standards; develop capability; give expert advice; drive continuous improvement; develop and deliver services; develop relationships; and knowledge and information management.

You should use GovS 001: Government functions to support you to ask the right questions about what you should have in place to manage your function; and get your function to follow associated guidance on how to meet GovS 001, so your function aligns with others and encourages joined up ways of working.

Using your functional standard

The standard for your function sets expectations for what needs to be done and why, within the scope of your function, to support achievement of the outcomes sought by organisations.

Your functional standard will define the most important roles and accountabilities for your functional work, at the centre and in departments and arm's length bodies.

You should make sure your functions practices and guidance - the 'how to' materials your function expects people to follow are aligned to your standard, so it is as easy as possible for people to meet it. This includes your strategy, plans, requirements and guidance; and routine documentation - which together form your cross-government functional governance and management framework.

You should position your standard as the primary reference source for ways of working and definitions, keeping it current with periodic reviews; and use it consistently as the basis for assurance, risk management and continuous improvement (see below).

Assurance, risk management and continuous improvement

The standards are designed to support existing risk management, assurance and control arrangements at all levels, without creating new burdens. Your standard mandates use of the Orange Book.

You should maintain a continuous improvement assessment framework to help organisations assess how well they are meeting your standard. Guidance has been produced to drive a consistent approach across functions.

An assessment framework provides organisations with a management tool, which makes it easy for them to understand how well they are doing and where they should aim to improve. The collective assessment frameworks support COOs to consistently plan for, manage and compare performance of different types of functional work across their organisations.

Where the centres of functions collect the self-assessments, they should be used to encourage peer review, peer support and masterclasses for your function's work across departments and arm's length bodies - asking the best to help the rest.

The assessment framework does not dilute or take the place of the relevant functional standard, which should be followed in full. Your standard provides a stable basis for senior, expert or independent support or challenge, to support risk management; and provides a baseline of expectations that audit and risk committees and internal auditors can draw upon.